

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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To: [Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee](#)
Subject: Submission on proposed changes to legislation affecting home educators
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To the members of The Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns about the recent Bill that was introduced to Queensland Parliament, which proposes changes to the *Education (General Provisions Act) 2006*, and other legislation.

We are not residents of Queensland, but we have three children, two of whom are currently registered with our state authority for home education. The third will be also, once they are old enough. We've been home educating for the better part of a decade. As such, I am highly invested in preserving the best interests of children everywhere in Australia who currently are, or potentially may one day be, home educated.

We only just underwent our re-registration home visit and interview last Friday. Days beforehand, I sent the Authorised Person lengthy documents reporting on our current registration period, and planning for the next. These included pages of descriptions of what my children have done, examples of completed workbook pages, samples of my children's writing, projects they'd completed, and tables comparing their proficiency in various subjects (maths, English, science and technology, history, geography, Classical Latin, and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education) against the outcomes prescribed by the state. It was a perfectly normal, standard interview...as far as it is normal to have someone from the government come to your home to check it and your children, scrutinise their academic abilities, and see how you live your lives.

No matter how prepared you are, these visits are undeniably stressful to prepare for. Hours are spent preparing documentation, often interrupting the very routines and learning activities we're meant to be reporting on. Even the most experienced, calm homeschooling parents attest to feelings of overwhelm when re-registration rolls around. I can almost hear the inner thoughts of people reading this; "well, that's what you signed up for!"..."you think teachers at schools have it any easier?". I know, because these are often my own inner thoughts, too.

I put it to the committee that the assumption that homeschoolers ought to be subject to such scrutiny is an extension of the pervasive notions in our society that home educators have chosen an inferior form of education for our children, and that citizens (especially women and children) are not to be trusted.

As ministers in your particular portfolios, I'm certain you have at times felt the pressure of media scrutiny, public concern, and political blame over alleged declining educational outcomes in Australian public schools. I'm even more certain that you hold the best interests of all children, and the future of Australia, paramount as you go forward with your consideration of the Bill in question. I ask that you extend home educators the same good faith.

I'm sure you have read many submissions so far that attest to the passionate, thoughtful, and flexible educational approaches of home educators across Queensland. I can also understand that, however convincing these appeals, it is still tempting, and assumedly within your mandate, to require some kind of quantitative and qualitative assurance that learning is being achieved within the homes of your constituents. As a parent and home educator, I'm truly grateful for your work and concern in this regard! I also urge you to

remember that home educating parents have gone to great efforts to steer away from systems that judge our children against arbitrary standards. Most of us research, deliberate, negotiate, compromise, and make ongoing sacrifices to make home educating our children possible. It is the responsibility of all parents to ensure their children are educated. Home educators just take this responsibility one step further, and enact it personally, instead of expecting others to do it for us. The proof that we take this decision very seriously is in the fact that most of us do it with a distinct lack of social, financial, and political support. You have to be intellectually and philosophically committed to home-education to walk its path: to sacrifice family income potential, to constantly face doubt and scrutiny from friends and relatives, to never get a break from parenting, and to find yourself politically irrelevant, despite how much you're saving the proverbial public purse. If you care about the well-being of home-educated children, I'd urge you not to needlessly add to the pressures on their already dedicated, vigilant parents. If there are home-educating parents out there who are so privileged not to be acting under these pressures- well, they are unlikely to be families of children whose well-being you need to worry about!

The following analogy may be more relevant to the NSW experience, but one could perhaps consider home-educators like commuters who have grown tired of traffic jams, train delays, and broken-down buses, and decide to ride bikes instead. We invest in a bike, we learn how to maintain it, and we conform to the laws that apply to us. It's hard work; we're an under-represented minority, there are very few bike paths and accommodations for us (I did say this analogy was more relevant to NSW), and it takes more time...but we get the satisfaction of getting where we need to go on our own steam, and we eventually reap other benefits, like improved mental and physical health. The changes entailed in this Bill are the equivalent of putting barriers in the way of cyclists. The insinuation is that they should just get back on the over-crowded, underserviced roads.

If you are concerned about the exodus of children from the state's schools and into home-education, common sense requires you to first consider why their parents have made the decision they have. Do their children have special needs? Were they previously in schools where they were not provided for? Do the parents trust public schools to provide their children with a sound moral framework, and gatekeep the constant onslaught of worldly media now in the palms of most children's hands? With these proposed changes, you risk putting added burdens on the shoulders of those who can least afford to carry them. The ones likely to be forced back into school systems are the very ones that schools are evidently ill-equipped to cater to. On an individual level, you're either adding to the burden of hard-working parents, or adding to the burden of hard-working teachers. Widely speaking, you're doing both.

If Queensland truly cares about the educational outcomes and well-being of children, and is committed to ensuring that parents and children are educated according in the national curriculum, there are many measures it could institute ahead of forcing home educators- who already have to prove they are providing a high-quality education to their children- to follow and report on a specific curriculum.

Why not embark on a program of making the national curriculum outcomes available for reference to all children and parents, in places where learning happens? You already have information graphics in parks, where children are being physically active, about what children gain by working together and independently to solve movement challenges. Add some ACARA learning goals and codes against the points! Add them to public safety campaigns on buses and trains, where children and families are travelling together and have time to read them. Why not remind them of ways to consider time and distance at the same time, and include some maths outcomes? Put them on grocery store receipts, for reference when parents are reflecting on choices about children's breakfasts and family

dinners. On landmarks of historical and cultural significance, where children are considering the feats, sacrifices and legacies of their forebears. Add them to information already on display in museums and art galleries, where children are immersing themselves in art and culture. Put them in the kinds of places where you'll meet parents and children of all educational backgrounds at their best and most receptive.

Once you've offered opportunities for whole communities to remain active, informed citizens, why not relax the reporting expectations on teachers in public schools? Perhaps they'll have more time to spend on hands-on-teaching and supervision, and reflecting with pupils on matters of shared values and social responsibility. Perhaps this will have some homeschooling families considering public schools in a fresh light.

If you think that sounds too contrived and paternalistic, or that your audience will struggle to find the ACARA outcomes interesting and relevant while they are out in their communities, then the people and their activities are not the problem.

We know how authentic learning happens. Home educators have done their research on this, and we're on top of it. It's why we choose to do what we do. Please don't follow New South Wales down the path of prescriptive educational bureaucracy. Walk the walk and do better, like Queensland has always done.

Yours faithfully,

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